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The Princely Woman and the Emperor:

Imagery of Female Rule in Benzo of Alba's *Ad Heinricum IV**

Alison Creber

Abstract: One of the functions of a panegyric was to interpret and define roles, and across the *Ad Heinricum IV* (written c.1085/6) Benzo of Alba developed distinctive images of rulership. He depicted Henry IV of Germany not simply as a Christian emperor ruling within the traditions of earlier Roman emperors, but also as a second Christ. Benzo also presented Adelaide of Turin, ruler of the mark of Turin, and Henry's mother-in-law, as a princely woman. This new category of quasi-regal ruling woman emerged in the eleventh century in response to broader social and political changes. In his letters to Adelaide, Benzo emphasised her princely status and importance to the imperial cause. Using masculine titles, the classical figure of Egeria, and especially the Virgin Mary, Benzo depicted Adelaide as a quasi-regal ruler, advisor and mediator. Benzo also drew a series of parallels between Adelaide and Henry using similar imagery, titles, and paired figures, such that Adelaide was Egeria to Henry's Numa Pompilius, and a second Virgin Mary to Henry's second Christ. Benzo thus created a remarkable image of Adelaide not simply as a ruler, but almost as a female counterpart to the emperor. Yet elsewhere in the *Ad Heinricum* Benzo was more circumspect. He stressed that Adelaide was subordinate to Henry, and used more ambivalent imagery to describe her (even comparing Adelaide with Eve). By this means, Benzo's image of Adelaide as a powerful princely woman was carefully calibrated to preserve both Henry's pre-eminent imperial status and the traditional gender hierarchy.

Keywords: Henry IV of Germany; Adelaide of Turin; Matilda of Tuscany; panegyric; rulership; aristocratic women.

Around 1080 Bishop Benzo of Alba purportedly sent a letter to "Duke A., lady and more than lady" (*Dux A. domina superdomina*).¹ The woman in question was Adelaide of Turin (c.1014/24–1091), ruler of the mark of Turin, and Benzo was seeking to gain her support for Henry IV of Germany (r.1056–1106). Benzo's letter to Adelaide is preserved in his sole extant work, known to historians as *Ad Heinricum IV imperatorem libri VII* (*Seven Books To Emperor Henry IV*, compiled

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¹ Benzo of Alba, *Ad Heinricum imperatorem libri VII*, ed. and trans. Hans Seyffert, MGH SS rer Germ 65 (Hannover, 1996) (hereafter *AH*), V.9(10), 482. On the date: Hans Seyffert, "Einleitung," in *AH*, 8–9, 18.

c.1085/6²). The *Ad Heinricum* is a panegyric addressed to Henry IV. Benzo's use of rulership imagery in relation to Henry, the emperor, has thus been well-studied.³ His portrayal of Adelaide as a princely woman, however, has not. The *Ad Heinricum* is typically studied from the perspective of the papal–imperial conflict (the so-called 'Investiture Controversy') of the later eleventh century.⁴ This conflict played out both in actual warfare in Germany and Italy, and in a war of words disseminated in the polemical literature written both by Henry IV's adherents, and by the adherents of Pope Gregory VII (r.1073-85).⁵ What was at stake in this conflict was the nature of political sovereignty in Christian society. Benzo naturally wrote in defence of Henry's sovereignty.

In addition to Henry's authority, Benzo also reflected on the political roles of elite women, several of whom, including Adelaide of Turin, played a prominent part in the conflict between Henry IV and Gregory VII.⁶ Yet Benzo's attitude to women and gender has been neglected in the historiography. Benzo's work is a particularly valuable source for Adelaide, whose considerable contemporary importance is not reflected in the limited attention she has been granted by modern historians.⁷ Adelaide's significance to Benzo is clear from the space which he devotes to her in the *Ad Heinricum*: he includes four metrical letters to Adelaide, plus a prologue introducing these letters; four letters to other recipients, Henry IV, Bishop Burchard of Lausanne, and Bishop Cunibert of Turin (twice), in which Benzo writes—explicitly or

² Saverio Sagulo, *Ideologia imperiale e analisi politica in Benzone, vescovo d'Alba* (Bologna: CLUEB, 2003), 18-23.

³ Below, nn.19-27.

⁴ Sagulo, *Ideologia*; Hugo Lehmgrübner, *Benzo von Alba. Ein Verfechter der Kaiserlichen Staatsidee unter Heinrich IV* (Berlin, 1887); Percy Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio. Studien und Texte zur Geschichte des römischen Erneuerungsgedankens vom Ende des karolingischen Reiches bis zum Investiturstreit* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1929), 258-274; Ian Robinson, *Authority and Resistance in the Investiture Contest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 70-75.

⁵ For overviews: Kathleen Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century: Spirituality and Social Change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Maureen Miller, "The Crisis in the Investiture Crisis Narrative," *History Compass* 7 (2009): 1570–1580.

⁶ Alison Creber, "Women at Canossa. The Role of Elite Women in the Reconciliation between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV of Germany (January 1077)," *Storicamente* 13 (2017), article no. 13: 1-44, freely accessible at: <<http://storicamente.org/creber-women-canossa>>.

⁷ *La contessa Adelaide e la società del secolo XI*, a special edition of *Segisium* 32 (1992); Giuseppe Sergi, *I confini del potere. Marche e signorie fra due regni medievali* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), chs.3-5.

implicitly—about Adelaide; plus a description of Adelaide’s activities in a later book of the *Ad Heinricum*.⁸

In many ways, Benzo’s letters to Adelaide are typical of those written by churchmen to elite women throughout the Middle Ages.⁹ Heavily influenced by Christian traditions of hagiography and exegesis, and supplemented with references to classical literature, medieval authors tended to portray women in terms of a limited set of stereotyped, and strongly gendered, roles. These were often based on familial roles, but it was also common for churchmen to use binary tropes—Eve and the Virgin Mary, hussies and matrons¹⁰—to praise women’s ‘manly’ virtues, and to compare or contrast women with biblical heroines.¹¹

There is, however, a key difference in Benzo’s letters: he wrote to Adelaide *as a ruler*, and acknowledged her status as such. Across the tenth and eleventh centuries shifts in dynastic power, and practices of inheritance and succession led to the emergence of a new category in medieval society: that of princely women. Princely women, including Adelaide, Beatrice of Tuscany (c.1020-1076) and her daughter, Matilda of Tuscany (1046-1115), inherited territories, ruled in their own right, and played key roles in medieval politics.¹² Their power exceeded that of many of their female contemporaries and predecessors. Benzo grappled with this new category of non-royal, but quasi-regal, ruling women in his work, as did several of his Italian

⁸ *AH*, V.9, 480-482; V.9(10)-V.12(13), 482-495 (to Adelaide); V.13(14), 496-499 (Henry); IV.42(13), 432-436 (Burchard); IV.32(3), 370-379 and V.8, 476-479 (Cunibert); VI,Narr.(4), 544-545. On Benzo and Adelaide: Lehmgrübner, *Benzo*, esp. 72-74; Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 75, 91, 118; Charles Previté-Orton, *The Early History of the House of Savoy (1000-1233)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 245-247; Massimo Oldoni, “L’iconografia letteraria di Adelaide,” in *Contessa Adelaide*, 223-228.

⁹ In general: Brigitte Kasten, “Krönungsordnungen für und Papstbriefe an mächtige Frauen im Hochmittelalter,” in Claudia Zey, ed., *Mächtige Frauen? Königinnen und Fürstinnen im europäischen Mittelalter (11.-14. Jahrhundert)* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke Verlag, 2015), 249-306.

¹⁰ Philippe Buc, “Italian Hussies and German Matrons. Liutprand of Cremona on Dynastic Legitimacy,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 29 (1995): 207-225.

¹¹ Kimberly LoPrete, “Gendering Viragos: Medieval Perceptions of Powerful Women,” in *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women 4: Victims or Viragos?*, eds. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 17-38.

¹² E. Goez, *Beatrix von Canossa und Tuszien. Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte des 11. Jahrhunderts* (Sigmaringen, 1995); P. Nash, *Empress Adelheid and Countess Matilda. Medieval Female Rulership and the Foundations of European Society* (Palgrave MacMillan: New York, 2017).

contemporaries, including Peter Damian, cardinal-bishop of Ostia (d.1072)¹³ and Bishop Bonizo of Sutri (d.c.1095).¹⁴ This paper considers the imagery of rule which Benzo used to describe Adelaide's princely power and status, and the circumstances that shaped his conception of her.

The image of Adelaide which emerges is complex and multivalent. When writing to Adelaide, Benzo used masculine titles, regal imagery, and the model of the Virgin Mary, to depict her as a princely woman who was crucial to the imperial cause. Benzo portrayed Adelaide as Henry's closest female counterpart, in preference to women of imperial rank including Henry IV's mother, Empress Agnes, whom Benzo praised in the *Ad Heinricum*,¹⁵ and Henry's wife, Bertha of Savoy, to whom Benzo made no reference. By contrast, when writing to other men *about* Adelaide, Benzo used female titles and more ambivalent imagery, even going as far as to compare her with Eve. Thus Benzo's image of Adelaide as a powerful princely woman was carefully calibrated to preserve both Henry IV's pre-eminent status and the traditional gender hierarchy.

Benzo and the Writing of the Ad Heinricum

Benzo, a northern Italian from a comparatively modest background, was educated in cathedral schools.¹⁶ Thereafter he entered imperial service, where his work was shaped by the political and literary traditions of the imperial chapel.¹⁷ Benzo was appointed bishop of Alba by 1059 (and perhaps before 1056), but around 1076/7¹⁸ Benzo was driven from his see by the Pataria, which were pro-papal religious factions, present in many Lombard cities, whose desire for far-reaching religious change led them into conflict with the episcopal hierarchy.¹⁹ In the 1080s he compiled

¹³ Alison Creber, "Mirrors for Margraves: Peter Damian's Different Models For Male and Female Rulers," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 42:1 (2016): 8-20.

¹⁴ Bonizo of Sutri, *Liber de vita Christiana*, ed. Ernst Perels (Berlin, 1930), VII.29, 249-251.

¹⁵ Below, n.74.

¹⁶ On Benzo: Seyffert, "Einleitung," 1-12; Giovanni Miccoli, "Benzone d'Alba," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 8 (1966), 726-728.

¹⁷ Robinson, *Authority*, 68-74.

¹⁸ Lehmgrübner, *Benzo*, 5, 55-6. On Benzo's whereabouts thereafter: Seyffert, "Einleitung," 8-11.

¹⁹ Paolo Golinelli, *La Pataria: lotte religiose e sociali nella Milano dell'XI secolo* (Novara: Jaca Book, 1984).

the *Ad Heinricum*, which consists of both verse and prose, not all of which was composed specifically for this work. The text is part anti-papal and anti-Patarene polemic, but Benzo's main aim in writing the *Ad Heinricum* was to praise Henry IV.

Throughout the *Ad Heinricum* Benzo repeatedly emphasised Henry's imperial status (even before Henry was crowned emperor in Rome in 1084). Benzo presented Henry not simply as the heir of his father, Emperor Henry III of Germany (r.1039-56), but of earlier Roman emperors, including Julius Caesar, Constantine, and Numa Pompilius (legendary second king of Rome).²⁰ In addition to Henry's imperial heritage, Benzo also emphasised the sacrality of Henry's imperial mission.²¹ Benzo explained Henry's rule by creating a correspondence between earthly rulers and heavenly ones. Benzo presented Henry both as God's anointed,²² who was the ruler and protector of the world after God,²³ and—above all—as a second Christ. As Saverio Sagulo demonstrates, Benzo referred to Henry using Christ-like attributes,²⁴ and passages from Scripture which are associated with Christ.²⁵ In Book VI, for example, Benzo described how Henry “manifested himself to the Romans”—a phrase associated with Christ's revelation that he is the son of God;²⁶ similarly Henry caused his opponents to wail and gnash their teeth, as was also the case with the enemies of Christ.²⁷ Moreover, Benzo drew sustained parallels between Henry's entry into Rome for his imperial coronation and Christ's entry into Jerusalem.²⁸

Benzo's other aim in writing the *Ad Heinricum* was to secure preferment for himself. By the 1080s Benzo—a “bishop without a bishopric”²⁹—was a disappointed man who felt that he

²⁰ AH, VI.5, 554; VI.6(7), 574; VI.6, 566. For Numa Pompilius, below, n.119.

²¹ Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 79-100. On sacral kingship: Franz-Reiner Erkens, *Herrschaftsakralität im Mittelalter. Von den Anfängen bis zum Investiturstreit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2006).

²² AH, I.4, 118; I.14, 140 (*christus Heinricus*); III.28(29), 352; VI.Praef., 500; AH, V.13(14) (*christus Domini*); 496 (*a deo coronatus*).

²³ AH, I.23, 164; V.5, 468.

²⁴ AH, VI.6, 566: *minister altissimus*; I.8(26), 172: *vicarius conditoris*. Cf. Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 92-94.

²⁵ Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 86-89.

²⁶ AH, VI.Praef., 520: *et manifestavit Romanis se ipsum*; John 2:11.

²⁷ AH, VI.Praef., 532: *Adversantes cogat flere cum stridore dentium*; Matt. 8:12.

²⁸ AH, I, 140.

²⁹ AH, VII.1, 580: *episcopus sine episcopatu*.

had not received the rewards which were his due.³⁰ Thus in books IV and V Benzo included copies of letters which he allegedly sent to various recipients, primarily other Lombard bishops, but also archbishops, Henry IV and Adelaide of Turin (the only letters to a woman to be included in Benzo's work). These letters served as a record of all that Benzo had done to promote the imperial cause in Italy, and therefore provided a platform for his renewed efforts to appeal to Henry for patronage. In this, however, Benzo was unsuccessful: his work did not prove popular with his contemporaries,³¹ nor does he seem to have been rewarded by Henry.

No letters written by Benzo have survived elsewhere and there is some debate about the authenticity of those preserved in the *Ad Heinricum*. Certain letters are universally thought to be literary fictions, including two supposedly written by Henry's mother, Empress Agnes, in support of anti-pope Honorius II (Cadalus of Parma) in 1063.³² Yet there is evidence that at least some of Benzo's letters were sent as correspondence. The library catalogue at Bordesholm contains references to a poem and a letter that Benzo sent to Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen,³³ and the manuscript of the *Ad Heinricum* suggests that Benzo sent letters to Adelaide. Benzo's first letter to Adelaide is written on poor quality parchment, in narrow lines, with no chapter headings, and the names of the sender and the recipient are abbreviated.³⁴ It is markedly shorter than Benzo's other letters to Adelaide and was evidently written at a different time from the other pages in the manuscript. Hugo Lehmgrübner thus argued that it was a draft of the letter that Benzo actually sent to Adelaide, which has simply been pasted wholesale into the *Ad Heinricum*.³⁵ Internal evidence also suggests that Benzo may have written to Adelaide. Both the

³⁰ Ian Robinson, *Papal Reform of the Eleventh Century: Lives of Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory VII* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 83.

³¹ The *AH* survives in a sole original manuscript (now in the University Library at Uppsala), which may have been written by Benzo himself: Seyffert, "Einleitung," 49.

³² *AH*, II.15-16. (By 1063 Agnes had recognised Alexander II as the rightful pope: Marie-Luise Bulst-Thiele, *Kaiserin Agnes von Poitou (1025–1077)* [Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1972], 77, 88.) More generally: Anne Latowsky, *Emperor of the World. Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800-1229* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 117-122.

³³ Seyffert, "Einleitung," 18-19.

³⁴ *AH*, 482 n.200.

³⁵ Lehmgrübner, *Benzo*, 19, 22, 72. Yet Seyffert, "Einleitung," in *AH*, 52-53 argues that since the text is accurate and tidy, it could be the finished version.

preface of Benzo's letters to Adelaide, and his letter to Henry IV, imply that Benzo wrote to Adelaide with Henry's knowledge, and possibly at his request.³⁶

Whether or not Benzo actually sent letters to Adelaide influences our understanding of Benzo, but does not fundamentally alter his *depiction* of Adelaide. The key difference is that if the letters were written c.1080, then Benzo was writing primarily to Adelaide, although naturally mindful of a wider audience, because of Henry's dire need. In 1080, in addition to facing ongoing warfare, Henry IV had just been excommunicated by Gregory VII for a second time.³⁷ While Henry needed help, Adelaide was unwilling to be drawn into the conflict,³⁸ and Benzo's letter-writing campaign was thus intended to tip the scales in Henry's favour. By contrast, if the letters were written, or substantially re-worked, for inclusion in the *Ad Heinricum*, c.1085/6, then Benzo was writing primarily to Henry, now crowned emperor and in a more secure position, to remind him of Benzo's own importance.

In Benzo's mind, one of the greatest proofs of his value to Henry was that it was thanks to his actions that Adelaide began to support Henry. In the preface to his letters to Adelaide, Benzo reminded Henry of his success: he compared Adelaide with "the queen of the fishes, the wonderful whale" who "could not be caught either by hook or by chain."³⁹ So Benzo approached Adelaide with honeyed words and, by this means, drew her "into the net of faith and pulled her to the shore at the feet of Emperor Henry."⁴⁰ This image of Adelaide is suggestive of the story of Jonah, who is swallowed by a "great fish," which acts as an agent of God (Jonah, 1-3),⁴¹ and also of the idea of churchmen as "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:18-22; 13:47-48).⁴² Benzo's description of Adelaide as "queen of the fishes" perhaps further implies that compared with Adelaide, Henry's other supporters were 'small fry'.

³⁶ AH, V.9, 480-484; V.13(14), 496-497; Previté-Orton, *History*, 245; Lehmgrübner, *Benzo*, 72-73.

³⁷ Ian Robinson, *Henry IV of Germany, 1056-1106* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch.5.

³⁸ On Adelaide's ambiguous position during the Investiture Context: Giancarlo Andenna, "Adelaide e la sua famiglia tra politica e riforma ecclesiastica," in *Contessa Adelaide*, 77-102.

³⁹ AH, V.9, 480: *Ipsa igitur quasi regina piscium, ammirabilis balena, non poterat capi neque hamo neque catena.*

⁴⁰ AH, V.9, 480: *deduxit eam in sagenam fidei traxitque ad litus ante pedes imperatoris HEINRICI.*

⁴¹ For other references to Jonah: nn.82-83 below.

⁴² Seyffert, *AH*, 481-482 n.199.

Why did Benzo attribute such importance to Adelaide? In the 1080s Adelaide—thrice-widowed and well into her fifties—had been ruling the mark of Turin, which she had inherited from her father, Margrave Olderic-Manfred of Turin (r.c.1000-1033/4), for decades. Since the death of her third husband, Otto of Savoy, c.1060, Adelaide had also been ruling the county of Savoy. The location of Benzo’s diocese of Alba, which lay within Adelaide’s jurisdiction,⁴³ probably influenced his view of Adelaide. Yet Benzo was not alone in his opinion: Adelaide was among the most important territorial princes in the empire, who had intervened decisively on Henry’s behalf at Canossa in January 1077 to ensure his release from excommunication.⁴⁴ How did Benzo address this princely woman?

Dux A. domina superdomina

Benzo used a variety of masculine and feminine titles to indicate Adelaide’s status. This is perfectly encapsulated in the citation with which this paper began: “Duke A[delaide], lady and more than lady.” Although Adelaide was the head of a margravian dynasty, Benzo used a ducal, rather than a margravian, title to address her. Adelaide was never in fact the titular margrave (*marchio*) of Turin.⁴⁵ This title was transmitted in succession to each of Adelaide’s three husbands, then to her eldest son, Peter, and finally to Peter’s son-in-law, Frederick of Montbéliard (r.c.1080-1091).⁴⁶ Adelaide shared her power with these men, but she did not relinquish it; she managed to hold, and maintain, her position for more than fifty years. Particularly during her final widowhood (c.1060-1091), Adelaide was the real—and acknowledged—ruler of Turin.

Benzo recognised Adelaide’s status as ruler both by writing to her for help, rather than to Frederick, the nominal margrave, and by referring to her as “duke” (*dux*) in the masculine, rather than “duchess” (*ducissa/ducatrrix*). At the same time, Benzo’s use of the unusual phrase *domina*

⁴³ Sergi, *Confini*, 106-107; Previté-Orton, *History*, 153, 157-165.

⁴⁴ Creber, “Women”.

⁴⁵ In her own charters, Adelaide was always entitled “countess” (*comitissa*): Sergi, *Confini*, 86-88, 127-129.

⁴⁶ Giuseppe Sergi, *Potere e territorio lungo la strada di Francia. Da Chambéry a Torino fra X e XIII secolo* (Naples: Liguori, 1981), 51-62.

superdomina acknowledged Adelaide's gender. *Domina* has no exact English equivalent. Medieval *dominae* often carried out the same activities, and held the same powers, as male lords (*domini*) but "lady," the English counterpart to "lord," does not have these connotations. Some scholars thus prefer to leave *domina* in the Latin;⁴⁷ others suggest 'female lord' or 'lordly woman' as an alternative.⁴⁸ Yet 'lordly woman'—as Benzo's *domina superdomina* implies—does not do Adelaide justice. Adelaide was a great heiress and the head of a margravian dynasty. She ruled large domains, exercised supra-regional power, and played a decisive role in papal and imperial politics in the later eleventh century. Although not royal herself, Adelaide was closely related to the imperial dynasty: Henry IV was married to her daughter, Bertha of Savoy.⁴⁹ Adelaide was of such exceptionally high status that she is better described as a 'princely woman'.

Benzo in fact twice refers to Adelaide as "prince" (*princeps*) in his letters to her.⁵⁰ At the highest level—following imperial Roman usage⁵¹—*princeps* could refer to kings and emperors. For Benzo, Henry IV is the "prince of princes" (*principem principum*).⁵² Military and administrative officers were also entitled *princeps*, particularly among the upper nobility (counts, dukes, bishops and abbots).⁵³ In medieval Germany and Italy these "princes of the realm" (*principes regni/imperii*) were closely connected with the royal/imperial court: they held their main benefices directly from the ruler; they had the right to participate in royal elections; and were obliged to provide the ruler with political counsel and military aid (*consilium et auxilium*).⁵⁴ Princes' power and status was such that they were sometimes seen as quasi-regal. Particularly within an Italian context, the

⁴⁷ Sean Gilsdorf, ed., *Queenship and Sanctity: The Lives of Matilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 66.

⁴⁸ Kimberly LoPrete, "Women, Gender and Lordship in Medieval France, c.1050-1250," *History Compass* 5 (2007): 1921-1941.

⁴⁹ Alison Creber, "Breaking Up is Hard to Do: Dissolving Royal Marriages in Eleventh-Century Germany," *German History* 37:2 (2019), forthcoming.

⁵⁰ *AH*, V.11(12), 486: *nostra beatissima princeps*; and nn.87, 138 below.

⁵¹ Lothar Wickert, "Princeps," in: *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* vol. 22 (1954), cols. 1998–2296.

⁵² *AH*, IV.35(6), 406.

⁵³ Jan Niermeyer et al, *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), s.v. *princeps*.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Arnold, *Princes and Territories in Medieval Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 26-39.

connection between *princeps* and imperial traditions was clear, yet the term was ambivalent enough to avoid causing offence.

Ruling Imagery in Benzo's Letters to Adelaide

Benzo did not simply use masculine titles to convey Adelaide's princely status: he also used regal and imperial imagery. In his first letter to Adelaide, Benzo argued that if Adelaide followed his advice and supported Henry, she would "sit in tranquillity under the king in the throne of royal majesty" and "see before you dukes and princes, administering the wealth of the lands of the world for you."⁵⁵ With this image—redolent with Marian overtones—Benzo seems to envisage Adelaide being given some kind of authority in Italy; Saverio Sagulo suggests this may have been a reference to vice-regal powers.⁵⁶ Similarly, but more explicitly, Donizo of Canossa (writing c.1111-1115) claimed that Matilda of Tuscany, another princely woman, was granted vice-regal powers by Henry V of Germany (r.1106-1125) at Bianello in 1111.⁵⁷ Benzo and Donizo both imply that the lands ruled by Adelaide and Matilda should be considered kingdoms and that their female rulers were quasi-regal. Yet Benzo's phrasing is ambiguous and what was meant in real terms is not clear: was this the trade-off for Adelaide's help, or bombast on Benzo's part?

In his second letter, Benzo called Adelaide a "patrician of the Roman senate" (*Romani senatus patricia*), and offered her the "keys of the whole empire" (*claves totius imperii*).⁵⁸ Like *princeps*, this ambiguous phrase situated Adelaide within imperial traditions of power. Although the institution of the Roman senate ceased to exist in the sixth century, from the eighth century certain individuals began to use the title 'senator' again. In Book III of the *Ad Heinricum* Benzo suggests that this was by imperial appointment.⁵⁹ Equally, as Benzo explains in Book VII, the

⁵⁵ AH, V.9(10), 482: *cum tranquillitate sedebis sub rege in solio regifice maiestatis, et videbis ante te duces cum principibus, orbis terrarum opes tibi ministrantibus.*

⁵⁶ Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 91 n.120.

⁵⁷ Donizo of Canossa, *Vita di Matilde di Canossa*, ed. Paolo Golinelli (Milan: Jaca Book, 2008), II.18, v.1255: *Cui Liguris regni regimen dedit in vice regis*; cf. David Hay, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa, 1046-1115* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 180.

⁵⁸ AH, V.10(11), 484.

⁵⁹ AH, III.23(24), 332; Schramm, *Kaiser*, 57.

title of patrician (*patricius*) was originally bestowed on representatives of the Byzantine emperors in Rome.⁶⁰ According to Benzo, Emperor Henry III, father of Henry IV, likewise appointed a patrician as his deputy (*vicarius*), to “attend to the affairs of the commonwealth [*res publica*]” in his absence.⁶¹ Yet ‘patrician’ does not solely mean ‘imperial deputy’: Benzo also used this term to refer to the authority of emperors to intervene in papal elections, in their capacity as “patrician of the Romans” (*patricius Romanorum*);⁶² and as a generic honorary title.⁶³

In Book VII, Benzo refers to Galla, who founded the church of San Lorenzo in Milan, as a “noble patrician of the Romans” (*Romanorum nobilis patricia*).⁶⁴ From the ninth century onwards, the foundation of San Lorenzo in Milan was attributed to Galla Placidia (c.392-450), daughter of Emperor Theodosius (r.379-392).⁶⁵ Sagulo thus identifies Benzo’s “noble patrician” as Galla Placidia.⁶⁶ Yet Benzo may also have had another Galla in mind: the daughter of Symmachus the Younger (d.526), a consul and patrician of Rome.⁶⁷ No tradition connects this Galla (d.550) with Milan, but according to a late eighth-century redaction of the *Liber pontificalis* (*Book of the Popes*), to which Benzo refers elsewhere in the *Ad Heinricum*,⁶⁸ Galla is said to have founded several religious institutions, including “St Stephen’s monastery called *cata Galla patricia*.”⁶⁹ This monastery was located close to St Peter’s and the connection with the Vatican was evidently important.⁷⁰ For Benzo, “patrician of the Roman senate” had connections with both papal and imperial Rome. It was intended to indicate Adelaide’s exceptionally high status, and was also suggestive of her political and military obligations in Italy.

⁶⁰ *AH*, VII.2, 582-586; trans. Robinson, *Reform*, 366-367. On Benzo’s use of the term ‘patrician’: Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 50-55. In general: Robinson, *Reform*, 5-6, 56-57; Schramm, *Kaiser*, 59-63, 229-236.

⁶¹ *AH*, VII.2, 588; trans. Robinson, *Reform*, 368.

⁶² *AH*, VII.2, 588.

⁶³ *AH*, II.7, 212; III.3, 276; III.11, 300; III.23(24), 332; V.1, 448; VII.2, 584.

⁶⁴ *AH*, VII.7, 648.

⁶⁵ Seyffert, *AH*, 648 n.324.

⁶⁶ Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 30, 98.

⁶⁷ Arnold Hugh et al, eds. *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire: Volume 2: A.D. 395-527* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 491, 1044-1046.

⁶⁸ *AH*, I.1, 92. On Benzo’s sources: Seyffert, “Einleitung,” 44-48.

⁶⁹ Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis: Texte, Introduction et Commentaire* (Paris, 1892), II, 23, 28; trans. Raymond Davis, *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), no. 98, 210, 219.

⁷⁰ Davis, *Lives*, no. 97, 144 n.91.

Yet referring to a woman as a patrician, or connected with the senate, was unusual.⁷¹ Although it had positive connotations for Benzo, this was not the case for some of his contemporaries. In January 1076, at the Synod of Worms, German bishops wrote a letter which marked a crucial turning point in the relationship between Henry IV and Gregory VII.⁷² The bishops criticised Gregory, among other failings, for allowing the church to be “administered by this new senate of women.”⁷³ This was certainly a reference to Beatrice of Tuscany and her daughter, Matilda of Tuscany; Empress Agnes (c.1025-1077) may also have been intended.⁷⁴ The bishops’ criticism of princely women’s political influence contrasts with Benzo’s view. In part this is because Benzo was arguing for Adelaide’s involvement in secular matters, rather than church ones. Yet the contrast is more apparent than real. Benzo’s denigration and/or praise of powerful women was brought about by particular political crises, and was not necessarily indicative of deeply held feelings about female rule.

In some ways Benzo’s depiction of women transcended gender. He recognised that elite women could use their power to positive effect, much as he was hoping that Adelaide would do on behalf of Henry. Broadly speaking, Benzo praised women who were, or might be, of benefit to the imperial church and/or obedient to Henry, and condemned those who opposed him. In addition to Adelaide, Benzo praised Empress Agnes, mother of Henry IV, for her support of Cadalus of Parma (anti-pope Honorius II),⁷⁵ and Empress Adelaide (931-999) for her pious foundations.⁷⁶ When Benzo criticised women he did so for political reasons, rather than

⁷¹ An exception is Marozia (c.890-982), who was entitled *senatrix omnium Romanorum*: Leoni Allodi and Guido Levi, eds., *Il Regesto sublacense dell’undecimo secolo* (Rome, 1885), 32 n.2, 80 n.1; and also entitled *patricia*, largely to praise her son, Pope John XI (r.930-935), who was “born of a patrician” (*nato patriciae*): Flodoard of Reims, *De Triumphis Christi*, in Jacques-Paul Migne, ed. *Patrologia Latina*, 135, col. 832A. For negative views of Marozia: n.72 below.

⁷² Hay, *Leadership*, 62-67.

⁷³ Carl Erdmann and Norbert Fickermann, eds., *Briefsammlung der Zeit Heinrichs IV*, MGH Briefe d. dt. Kaiserzeit 5 (Weimar, 1950), no. 20: *per hunc feminarum novum senatum [...] administrari*. This may be a reference to the ‘old’ senate of women condemned in Isaiah 3:12 (Hay, *Leadership*, 203), or to Liutprand of Cremona’s criticism of Marozia’s influence over the papacy in the mid-tenth century: *Antapodosis*, ed. Joseph Becker, MGH SS rer Germ 41 (Hannover, 1915), III.44-45, 96-97.

⁷⁴ Hay, *Leadership*, 63.

⁷⁵ *AH*, II.1, 192; II.13-16, 230-244; VII.2, 594, 598.

⁷⁶ *AH*, VII.7, 648.

gendered ones. He condemned Beatrice of Tuscany (c.1020-1076) and her daughter, Matilda, not because he was opposed to the exercise of power by princely women per se, but because he saw their support for Popes Alexander II and Gregory VII as undermining Henry.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the language and imagery that Benzo used to attack Beatrice and Matilda was gendered and followed well-worn paths of medieval misogyny. In book I of the *Ad Heinricum*, Benzo explained that for order to be restored three things needed to be done, one of which was to “smite the Amazons in their hinder parts [Ps 77:66].”⁷⁸ He also wrote more than once about the conspiracy between monks and “little women” and “hussies” (*feminellas, mulierculae*) against Henry.⁷⁹ Although he did not name these Amazons and hussies, it is likely that Benzo was referring to Beatrice and her daughter Matilda.⁸⁰ Benzo thus established a similar opposition between virtuous, imperial ‘matrons’ (Adelaide and Agnes) and immoral Italian ‘hussies’ (Beatrice and Matilda) to that observed by Philippe Buc in Liutprand of Cremona’s *Antapodosis* (*Revenge/Retribution*, written 958-962).⁸¹

Although Benzo’s letters emphasised Adelaide’s princely status, they were also clearly intended to teach her how to behave. Benzo was convinced that in advising Adelaide to support Henry, he was relating the will of God. In his first letter, “B[enzo] faithful, and more than faithful, [sends Adelaide] the counsel not of Ahitophel but of the holy archangel Michael.”⁸² Ahitophel is a biblical exemplar of a bad counsellor: he was an advisor of King David, whom he deserted in favour of Absalom. When Absalom’s revolt failed, Ahitophel hanged himself (2 Sam. 15:12, 17:1-23). Michael, by contrast, was the prince of the angels who, during the war in heaven, confronted the dragon (Satan) and cast him down (Rev. 12:7-9). Benzo cast himself on the side of the angels, and suggested that there would be dire consequences for Adelaide if she failed to

⁷⁷ Cf. Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 103-104, 151-152.

⁷⁸ *AH*, I.19, 156: *Postremo percutiat Amazones in posteriora ne sint novissima earum prioribus peiora.*

⁷⁹ *AH*, VI.Narr.(4), 546; VII.2, 600.

⁸⁰ Benzo’s “Amazons” and “hussies” are often understood as references to Matilda (Seyffert, *AH*, 155 n.314; Hay, *Leadership*, 204). Given the plural, and the date (1060s), Beatrice must also be intended.

⁸¹ Buc, “Hussies”.

⁸² *AH*, V.9(10), 482: *B. fidelis et superfidelis, / consilium non Achitophelis, sed sancti archangeli Michabelis.*

heed his advice. His use of the language of lord–man bonds—Adelaide is his *domina superdomina*; he is her *fidelis et superfidelis*—made a related point. Reciprocal personal obligations were fundamental to relations between lords and their followers. Obliquely, this letter emphasised that just as Benzo was Adelaide’s *fidelis*, she in turn must be faithful and obedient to her lord, Henry.

In his second letter, Benzo emphasised the importance of obedience to authority with reference to the story of Jonah, who fled from the face of the Lord (Jonah 1-3). Benzo reminded Adelaide that:

it was of no use to Jonah that he prepared to flee; willingly or unwillingly, he brought the word of salvation to the Ninevites. Therefore everything has been set in accordance with the will of God. And you alone now struggle against his authority?⁸³

According to Massimo Oldoni, the example of Jonah is the key to understanding Benzo’s purpose in his letters to Adelaide.⁸⁴ Yet—while Benzo certainly thought that Adelaide should accept divine will, as relayed by Benzo—Jonah is not the only, nor even the most important, model cited to encourage this result. Benzo’s letters depict Adelaide as a second Virgin Mary far more than as a second Jonah. There were many different medieval traditions about Mary, who could thus be invested with different meanings according to the needs of a particular author.⁸⁵ In Benzo’s construction she was, above all, an obedient figure who did not refuse what had been fore-ordained and did not ignore God’s messenger.

Elsewhere in the *Ad Heinricum* Benzo used the Virgin Mary as a general exemplar for entry into Christ’s—and Henry’s—service.⁸⁶ In his letters to Adelaide, the Virgin Mary is clearly a guide for proper feminine behaviour. Oblique Marian references can be found in Benzo’s second letter to Adelaide, in which he admonished Adelaide to accept God’s will, like the handmaid of

⁸³ AH, V.10(11), 484: *Nil denique valuit Iona quod fugam paravit; nolens, volens, verbum salutis Ninivitis ministravit. In voluntate ergo Dei universa sunt posita. Et vos sola nitimini modo contra eius imperium?*

⁸⁴ Oldoni, “L’iconografia,” 227. Benzo also compared *himself* to Jonah in his fourth letter to Adelaide: AH, V.12(13), 492.

⁸⁵ Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁸⁶ AH, II.5, 210.

the Lord (Luke 1:38).⁸⁷ Benzo continued this theme in his third letter to Adelaide, arguing that she must accept her fore-ordained role as the protector of both Henry and of the Church:

You are indeed that ‘queen’ who appeared to the psalmist at the right hand of God [Ps 44:10] in finely woven garments [Ezech. 16:13]. You are full of graces [Esth. 15:17; Luke 1:28], your eyes of doves [Cant. 1:14]; go after him who is the God of mercies. Do not fear, o prince, fore-chosen since the beginning of the world, nor be afraid [Josh. 8:1] because you see all things under your feet. Stretch out your right hand to sinking Rome, help the king [who is] looking to you with pious eyes. The whole church depends on these two, see what you may do holy Adelaide.⁸⁸

This passage makes extensive use of regal and Marian imagery, much of it drawn from the Old Testament.⁸⁹ From the ninth century, the queen of Psalm 44, who sits “at the right hand of God,” was often seen as a prefiguration of the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven,⁹⁰ and verses from Psalm 44 were used during Marian feasts.⁹¹ Given Benzo’s emphasis on Adelaide’s princely status, he may have found this reference to the queen of Psalm 44 particularly apt. Adelaide, who appears to have been devoted to the Virgin Mary,⁹² may also have been pleased by the parallels between herself and Mary as Queen of Heaven.

There are other Marian references in this letter: the Bride from the Song of Songs, whose “eyes were of doves,” was often associated both with the queen of Psalm 44 and with the Virgin Mary. Although it was not until the twelfth century that the Song of Songs was fully interpreted as a commentary on the Annunciation, verses from it had been incorporated into the liturgy for

⁸⁷ AH, V.10(11), 484: *Certe, certe, Deus faciet secundum suam voluntatem de sua ancilla, quae actenus custodita est ab eo tamquam oculi pupilla.*

⁸⁸ AH, V.11(12), 488: *Tu es quippe regina illa, quae apparuisti psalmistae a dextris Dei in veste polimita. Plena es gratiarum, oculi tui columbarum; vade post eum, qui est Deus misericordiarum. Ne timeas, o princeps, ab initio seculi prelecta, neque formides quoniam omnia sub pedibus vides. Porrigere dextram Romae mergenti, succurre regi piis oculis te respicienti. In his duobus pendet tota aecclesia, vide quid facias, sancta Adelegida.*

⁸⁹ On associations between queenship and Mary: Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women’s Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. 166–68, 172–74.

⁹⁰ Diana Webb, “Queen and Patron,” in Anne Duggan, ed., *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 205–221.

⁹¹ Susan Boynton, “The Bible and the Liturgy,” in *The Practice of the Bible in the Western Middle Ages*, ed. eadem and D. Reilly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 20–21.

⁹² Adelaide often made donations to religious institutions dedicated to Mary, including her own foundation of Santa Maria in Pinerolo: Carlo Cipolla, “Il gruppo dei diplomi adalaidini a favore dell’abbazia di Pinerolo,” in Ferdinando Gabotto, ed., *Cartario di Pinerolo fino all’anno 1300* (Pinerolo, 1899), 307–56.

the feasts of Assumption and the Nativity of the Virgin as early as the ninth century.⁹³ Finally, the reference to Adelaide as “full of graces” recalls the angel Gabriel’s words to Mary at the Annunciation: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee” (Luke 1:28). This text was part of the liturgy, and was incorporated into the well-known Marian prayer the *Ave Maria* (‘Hail Mary’), which became popular from the mid-eleventh century onwards.⁹⁴ With these references to the queenship—and obedience—of the Virgin Mary, Benzo was arguing that Adelaide, a princely woman, should—similarly obediently—use her political power to support Henry IV, and bring about unity between Church and State.

Benzo made this point more explicitly with reference to the common medieval palindrome ‘Eva to Ave’,⁹⁵ and to the mystical meaning of Adelaide’s name. Just as

Eve [*Eva*] reversed is ‘Hail’ [*Ave*], so does ‘Adelaide’, with parts reversed, become a good and sweet name. For what is Adelaide [*Adelegida*] except ‘Give the sons of Adam to the law’ [*Da legi Ade filios*]. That is to say: ‘Be the giver of law over the folds of the Christian flock’. Be the guardian of the flock of Christ, which rash presumption has scattered through the thickets.⁹⁶

The Eva/Ave palindrome neatly encapsulated the typological relationship between Eve and Mary. In the second century, the Pauline conception of Christ as the ‘second Adam’ (1 Cor. 15:45) was extended to Mary as a ‘second Eve’. Thereafter, Mary’s obedience was seen as instrumental in the restoration of divine order, which was made chaotic by Eve’s disobedience.⁹⁷ According to Benzo after the Virgin Mary gave birth to Christ, the rule of faith was restored.⁹⁸ Since discord had returned to the contemporary church, which was embodied for Benzo by Gregory VII and his supporters, a new Mary (Adelaide) was needed to restore the Christian

⁹³ Rachel Fulton, “Mimetic devotion, Marian exegesis, and the historical sense of the Song of Songs,” *Viator* 27 (1996): 86-116.

⁹⁴ Herbert Thurston, *Familiar Prayers. Their Origin and History* (London: Burns Oates, 1953), 90-114.

⁹⁵ First found in the early-ninth-century hymn, *Ave maris stella*: Seyffert, *AH*, 488 n.229.

⁹⁶ *AH*, V.11(12), 488: *Igitur sicut Eva conversim fit Ave, ita Adeleida conversis partibus fit nomen bonum atque suave. Quid est enim Adelegida i nisi 'Da legi Ade filios'. Hoc est dicere: 'Esto datrix legis super caulas christiani gregis'. Esto gregis Christi custos gregaria, quem dispersit per dumeta presumptio temeraria.*

⁹⁷ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1976, rpt. 1985), ch. 4.

⁹⁸ *AH*, IV.34(35), 398.

community to harmony. Adelaide, as her name indicated, was perfectly placed to “be the guardian of the flock of Christ.”

Marian imagery is also present in Benzo’s fourth letter to Adelaide. Here, with a clear, even inflated, sense of his own purpose, Benzo assumed the role of a prophet. He reiterated to Adelaide that his advice came from God: “through me, his lowest servant, God reveals his mysteries to you.”⁹⁹ Benzo argued that Adelaide must fulfil her preordained role: “in the spirit and power of Elijah you will prepare the way for Caesar [Luke 1:17].”¹⁰⁰ And just as Elijah told Ahab:

There will be no rain, except by my word [3 Kings17:1], so, o lady, ... a similar sentence shall come from your mouth: ‘As the Lord lives, there shall be no bishop, nor margrave, nor any man be raised to any honour, except by my word [3 Kings17:1].’ O praiseworthy piety of the Redeemer who deigned to raise His handmaid to the height of such honour.¹⁰¹

By indicating that Adelaide would be able to appoint bishops and margraves Benzo once again emphasised her princely status. At the same time, Benzo also indicated how unusual it was for a woman to be placed in such a position.

Benzo ended his fourth letter with an overt comparison between Adelaide and Mary. He urged Adelaide to: “Say, therefore, o lady, as Mary said to the angel: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word [Luke 1:38].”¹⁰² The tenor of all of Benzo’s previous letters culminated in his use of the Virgin Mary as an exemplar here. Following the model of the Annunciation Adelaide, like Mary, must accept her destiny as relayed to her by the lord’s messenger and obediently fulfil his wishes. The key difference, in Adelaide’s case, is that Benzo was the lord’s messenger, and she must fulfil *Henry’s* will rather than the will of God.

⁹⁹ AH, V.11(12), 490-491: *Licet converser in miseria, tamen per me, ultimum servum suum, revelat tibi Deus sua mysteria.*

¹⁰⁰ AH, V.12(13), 494: *Nam in spiritu et virtute Heliae parabis viam cesari.*

¹⁰¹ AH, V.12(13), 494: *Et sicut Helias, fretus auctoritate prophetica, dixit ad regem Achab: ‘Quia non erit pluvia, nisi per verbum meum’, ita, o domna, ... exiet ab hore tuo similis sententia: ‘Vivit Dominus, si erit episcopus, aut marchio, vel si sublimabitur ad aliquem honorem aliquis homo, nisi per verbum meum.’ O laudanda pietas Redemptoris, quae ancillam suam elevare dignatur ad culmen tanti honoris.*

¹⁰² AH, V.12(13), 494: *ut in manibus tuis sit orbis terrarum cura... Nam in spiritu et virtute Heliae parabis viam cesari... Dic ergo, o domna, sicut Maria ad angelum: ‘Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat michi secundum verbum tuum’.*

Similarities between Adelaide and Henry

A comparison of the titles, exempla and imagery Benzo used when writing to and about Adelaide and Henry reveals numerous points of similarity. Benzo drew remarkable parallels between Adelaide, a princely woman, and Henry, an emperor. Benzo referred to each of them as being protected by God “like the pupil of his eye,”¹⁰³ and envisaged them both as sitting at the right hand of God.¹⁰⁴ Benzo also used the same—or similar—titles to refer to Adelaide and Henry: they are both entitled *princeps*¹⁰⁵ and *patricius/patricia*,¹⁰⁶ and while Adelaide was Benzo’s *domina*, Henry was his *dominus*, and to both, Benzo was *fidelis et superfidelis*.¹⁰⁷ Where Benzo suggested that Adelaide was granted vice-regal powers in Italy, he explicitly stated that Henry was chosen by God to be His vicar (*vicarius conditoris*).¹⁰⁸ While Benzo emphasised the sacrality of Henry’s imperial mission,¹⁰⁹ he also attributed a quasi-sacral status to “holy” (*sancta*) and “most blessed” (*beatissima*) Adelaide.¹¹⁰ Using exempla, Benzo also drew parallels between Adelaide and Henry, and other paired figures, including Egeria and Numa Pompilius, Martha and Christ, and the Virgin Mary and Christ. Cumulatively, this suggests a unified view, not simply of male imperial rule, but also of female princely rule.

While Benzo’s ideological use of Numa Pompilius and Christ in relation to Henry has long been recognised, his depiction of Adelaide as Henry’s female counterpart in rule has not. Yet, given Benzo’s view of Henry as a second Christ, his depiction of Adelaide as a second Mary is clearly significant. He envisaged Henry and Adelaide as divine deputies, and as important mediators between the human world and the heavenly one. At the beginning of Lent 1082, Benzo wrote to Henry about the success of his letter-writing campaign to Adelaide. Benzo

¹⁰³ AH, I.Dedicatio, 86: *gracias agas ei, o cesar, qui te custodivit tanquam oculi pupillam*. For Adelaide, above, n.86; Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 90-91.

¹⁰⁴ AH, I, 118: *dextram sui Christi Heinrichi sua sustentat dextera*. For Adelaide, above n.87.

¹⁰⁵ Above, nn.49, 51.

¹⁰⁶ Above, nn.57, 61.

¹⁰⁷ AH, I.4, 118. For Adelaide above, n.81.

¹⁰⁸ AH, I.8(26), 172. On kings as *vicarii Dei*: Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 64, 66.

¹⁰⁹ Above n.20.

¹¹⁰ Above, nn.87, 49. On Adelaide as *sancta*: Schramm, *Kaiser*, 272.

emphasised that Adelaide would conform to the ideal of the Virgin Mary, by explaining that she “received the messenger of my lord [i.e. Benzo] as if she saw the angels of God.”¹¹¹ Allusions to Adelaide as a Marian-figure may have been designed to appeal to Henry. As Ian Robinson has shown, the Virgin Mary was a special patron of Henry and his dynasty.¹¹² They were also designed to demonstrate that Adelaide was crucial to his imperial mission. Adelaide, Benzo argued, was destined to place herself in Henry’s service, so that, with her aid, Henry could achieve his destiny as a Christian emperor.¹¹³ Henry, as a second Christ, was to mediate between God and man,¹¹⁴ while Adelaide’s role as a second Virgin Mary, the medieval intercessor par excellence, was to intervene on Henry’s behalf.

Benzo also used the paired figures of Egeria and Numa Pompilius, and Martha and Christ, to make related points. In Book VI of the *Ad Heinricum*, Benzo depicted Adelaide, now fully converted to the imperial side, as a mediator between Henry IV and one of Henry’s main opponents in Italy, Matilda of Tuscany.¹¹⁵ Adelaide’s own high status, and her connections both with Henry and with Matilda (her second cousin),¹¹⁶ made her the perfect mediator. According to Benzo,

Lady [*domna*] Adelaide sought out the king, her son[-in-law, i.e. Henry],
Wanting to mediate between the king and Matilda.
Indeed she will give herself and what is hers to the king, her son[-in-law]
So that she, like Martha, may be constantly in the council of the king,
And was like a second Egeria to the new [Numa] Pompilius¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ *AH*, V.13(14), 496: *Sic enim suscepit nuntios domini mei, ac si vidisset angelos dei.*

¹¹² Robinson, *Henry*, 203-204.

¹¹³ Laurent Ripart, “La tradition d’Adélaïde dans la maison de Savoie,” in Patrick Corbet et al, eds, *Adélaïde de Bourgogne, genèse et représentations d’une sainteté impériale* (Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2002), 69-71.

¹¹⁴ Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 91.

¹¹⁵ Adelaide was also one of the mediators at Canossa, but Benzo, who only briefly alludes to these events, makes no mention of her: Creber, “Women”.

¹¹⁶ They were related via Prangarda of Canossa: Sergi, *Confini*, 79.

¹¹⁷ *AH*, IV.4, 544: *Peciit filium regem domna Adeleida, / Inter regem et Mathildam fieri vult media / Ipsa quidem se et sua dabit regi filio, / Ut sit frequens ceu Martha in regis consilio / Et Hegeria secunda recenti Pompilio.*

Little came of these negotiations, if they ever took place,¹¹⁸ but that was not Benzo's primary concern. Benzo made use of classical and biblical figures to depict Adelaide not just as a mediator, but also as one of Henry's chief counsellors.

Egeria is a classical exemplar of a female counsellor: she was a nymph who was an advisor to (and in some accounts, wife of) Numa Pompilius.¹¹⁹ Across the *Ad Heinricum* Benzo emphasised that while Numa Pompilius was a "divine counsellor" (*divinus consiliator*),¹²⁰ it was Egeria's wisdom and good advice which ensured his success.¹²¹ Around 1075, for example, Benzo wrote to admonish Bishop Cunibert of Turin for not doing more to resist the Patarenes.¹²² To protect the faith, Benzo suggested that Cunibert should be like the sons of the "old grandmother Gambara" (*Gambara vetus avia*). When Gambara's sons followed her advice, just as Numa Pompilius trusted Egeria (*qui credulus Hegerie*), their people prospered and faith spread.¹²³ Oldoni sees Gambara simply as an allusion to Lombard origin myths,¹²⁴ but it is also an oblique reference to Adelaide. When Benzo wrote to Cunibert (c.1075), Adelaide, like Gambara, was "an old grandmother" with two sons—Peter (d.1078) and Amadeus (d.1080)—who ruled alongside her. Moreover, in 1070, she had acted decisively to prevent a Patarene candidate from becoming bishop of Asti.¹²⁵ Benzo also explicitly referred to Adelaide as Egeria in a letter to Bishop Burchard of Lausanne (r.1056-1089), the chancellor of Italy (r.1079-1087). In this letter, written c.1080, Benzo argued that Adelaide should be made the leader of the imperial party in Lombardy: "let her be named teacher of the council by the legates, as ruler and leader of the general consultation, just as Egeria was the leader in the cause of [Numa] Pompilius."¹²⁶

¹¹⁸ Robinson, *Henry*, 221.

¹¹⁹ Sagulo, *Ideologia*, 75, 118 n.76.

¹²⁰ *AH*, II.3, 202. For comparisons between Henry's father, Henry III, and Numa Pompilius: V.1, 448; VI.6, 570.

¹²¹ *AH*, IV.41(12), 426.

¹²² *AH*, IV.32(3), 370-378; Lehmgrübner, *Benzo*, 44ff. On the Pataria, above n.18.

¹²³ *AH*, IV.32(3), 370-372. On Gambara: Walter Pohl, "Gender and ethnicity," in Leslie Brubaker and Julia Smith, eds., *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36-38.

¹²⁴ Oldoni, "Iconografia," 224.

¹²⁵ Arnulf of Milan, *Liber gestorum recentium*, ed. Claudia Zey, MGH SS rer. Germ. 67 (Hannover, 1994), III.7, 173-174.

¹²⁶ *AH*, IV.42(13), 434: *Hadeleidam appella in regali federe, / voca eam regis matrem, si vis hostem perdere / Per legatum clama eam magistram concilii, / Dominam atque ducatricem communis consilii, / Ut Hegeria dux fuit in causis Pompilii.*

The biblical Martha and her sister Mary (Luke 10:38-42; John 11:12ff, 12:1-8) were frequently interpreted as types of the active and contemplative life.¹²⁷ Martha, who served Christ food, represented the active life; Mary, who did not help Martha, but sat at Christ's feet and listened to his teaching, represented the contemplative life. Christian authors often saw the contemplative life as preferable to the active, but Martha was increasingly exalted from the eleventh century onwards.¹²⁸ This is certainly the case in Benzo's work, where Adelaide's support for Henry is praised.¹²⁹

Benzo does not, however, specify what kind of support he envisages Adelaide giving Henry. As was clear from her important diplomatic role at Canossa,¹³⁰ Adelaide was well-placed to aid Henry, if she chose. Other contemporaries emphasised the importance of Adelaide's control of Alpine passes. William of Chiusa, for example, writing in 1095, explained that Henry did not dare to refuse Adelaide's request that he release the abbot of Chiusa, whom he had taken prisoner, because "in a certain sense, she held the keys to the kingdom, the entrance to Lombardy."¹³¹ Equally, Arnulf of Milan (writing c.1077) called Adelaide a "truly military *domina*" (*militaris admodum domina*) in relation to her attack on Asti.¹³² It is, in fact, likely that after 1082 Adelaide mobilised her followers, and probably also campaigned herself on Henry's behalf.¹³³ Benzo, however, did not suggest that Adelaide should play a military role. This may be because elsewhere in the *Ad Heinricum* Benzo depicted the intervention of other women—Beatrice and Matilda of Tuscany—in military affairs in negative terms.¹³⁴ Certainly, Benzo preferred to depict Adelaide as Henry's advisor and mediator, rather than as an active military agent.

¹²⁷ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval and Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), 3-141.

¹²⁸ Constable, *Studies*, 61-72.

¹²⁹ This positive view of Martha is also found in relation to Matilda of Tuscany's support for Gregory VII: Hay, *Leadership*, 73, 214.

¹³⁰ Above n.43.

¹³¹ William of Chiusa, *Vita S. Benedicti II Abbatis Clusensis*, ed. Georg Pertz, MGH SS 12 (Hannover, 1856), ch.12, 205: *eo quod regni quodammodo claves et Longobardie teneret adytum*.

¹³² Above, n.124.

¹³³ Previté-Orton, *History*, 247-249.

¹³⁴ *AH*, II.1, 192; III.28(29), 350; VI, Praef., 516; VI.4, 544.

Differences In The Way Benzo Writes To And About Adelaide

Despite the remarkable parallels which Benzo drew between Adelaide and Henry, he also maintained clear and hierarchical differences between them. In particular, Benzo expressed Adelaide's princely status differently when writing to her versus to other men. In contrast with many medieval authors, Benzo rarely utilised familial language to describe Adelaide, particularly when writing to her. Yet elsewhere in the *Ad Heinricum* Benzo referred to Henry as Adelaide's son (*filius*),¹³⁵ and urged Burchard of Lausanne to call her the "king's mother" (*regis mater*).¹³⁶ This highlighted the personal, affective bonds which meant that Adelaide should help Henry, but did so by distorting their relationship: Henry, who was married to Adelaide's daughter, Bertha, was her son-*in-law*, not her son.¹³⁷

While princes—and lordship more generally—are often implicitly gendered male, Benzo clearly indicated that Adelaide was able to exercise princely power. As we have seen, he did so, when writing to Adelaide, by referring to her with masculine terminology (*dux/princeps*). Medieval authors often used masculine titles and attributes to describe powerful women, and Benzo was not alone in referring to Adelaide in this way. In 1064, for example, Peter Damian wrote to "most excellent Duke Adelaide" (*Adalaida excellentissima dux*), seeking her help in imposing clerical celibacy in her lands.¹³⁸ Yet Adelaide is only entitled duke or prince in letters that are directly addressed to her. In letters to men she is referred to by feminine titles or no title at all. Benzo wrote *to* duke/prince (*dux/princeps*) Adelaide, but *about* "lady" (*domina*), "duchess" (*ducatrrix*), and "princess" (*principissa*) Adelaide.¹³⁹ Similarly, although Peter Damian wrote *to* "Duke Adelaide" in 1064, writing to the archpriest Peter in 1069 he referred to "Countess Adelaide" (*comitissa Adalaida*).¹⁴⁰ Nicholangelo d'Acunto suggests that Damian may have made

¹³⁵ Above, n.116.

¹³⁶ *AH*, IV.42(13), 434.

¹³⁷ Sergi, *Confini*, 88.

¹³⁸ *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, ed. Kurt Reindel, MGH Briefe d. dt. Kaiserzeit, 4 vols. (Munich, 1983-1993), III, no. 114 (1064), 296.

¹³⁹ *AH*, VI.4, 544 (*principissa*); V.13(14), 496 (*domina*); and n.125 above.

¹⁴⁰ Damian, *Briefe*, IV, no. 162 (1069), 147.

this distinction because Adelaide was ruling the mark on behalf of her son, Peter, in 1064, who had come of age by 1069.¹⁴¹ Yet Peter had already reached the age of majority and was entitled margrave in 1064.¹⁴² Moreover, Benzo and Damian were not alone in making this distinction, nor was it limited to Adelaide. In the 1070s, for example, Gregory VII wrote a series of letters to “Duke Beatrice [of Tuscany]” (*Beatrix dux*), while in letters to men he wrote about “Countess Beatrice” (*Beatrix comitissa*).¹⁴³ These distinctions have largely gone unremarked.¹⁴⁴ Yet they add a new perspective to the on-going debate about medieval authors’ descriptions of women as ‘manly’.¹⁴⁵

Kimberly LoPrete suggests that women were particularly likely to be referred to as *dux* in poetry.¹⁴⁶ Although Benzo wrote metrical letters, it was not genre but the gender of his correspondent which determined whether he used a masculine or a feminine title. Benzo clearly acknowledged that Adelaide was a woman (*domina*), yet because she ruled, she was more than a woman (*superdomina*); for this reason, *when writing to her*, he referred to her by masculine titles. Given that Benzo was seeking Adelaide’s support, this terminology was presumably intended to be complimentary. No letters from Adelaide have survived, however, so it is difficult to say what she made of the exemplars with which Benzo presented her.¹⁴⁷ Benzo’s use of masculine titles thus suggests: first, that for him they denoted greater status and authority than feminine ones;

¹⁴¹ Nicolangelo d’Acunto, “L’aristocrazia del *Regnum Italiae* negli scritti di Pier Damiani,” in Amleto Spicciari, ed., *Formazione e strutture dei ceti dominanti nel medioevo: marchesi, conti e visconti nel Regno Italico (secc. IX-XII)* (Rome, 2003), 335-336.

¹⁴² Sergi, *Confini*, 89.

¹⁴³ *Das Register Gregors VII.*, ed. Erich Caspar, MGH Epp. sel, 2, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1920-1923), I.4, I.77, II.9, III.5 (*dux*); I.19, I.25, I.46, II.30 (*comitissa*).

¹⁴⁴ Masculine titles are often feminised and obscured in modern translations: *AH*, 483: *dux* is rendered “duchess” (*Herzogin*); and 346, 487, 489: *princeps* is translated “princess” (*Fürstin*). For (mis)translations in Damian’s and Gregory VII’s letters: Owen Blum, *The Letters of Peter Damian* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), II, no. 51, 335; V, no. 114, 294; Herbert Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), I.4, 4-5; I.77, 80; II.9, 103; III.5, 179. (Cowdrey indicates in a footnote that the Latin title was masculine).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. LoPrete, “Women,” with further references.

¹⁴⁶ LoPrete, “Gendering,” 28 n.30, 30 n.36.

¹⁴⁷ Joan Ferrante, *To the Glory of her Sex. Women’s Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 7, argues that men’s letters are indicative of the interests of their female recipients. By contrast, LoPrete, “Women,” 1923 cautions that they “might not accurately represent a woman’s views or actions as she would have described them.”

and second, Benzo's assumption that a princely woman would wish to have her status acknowledged in the same way as a man. By contrast, in letters to other men Benzo referred to Adelaide by feminine titles. This may indicate Benzo's own ambiguous feelings about princely women and/or his perception of his male correspondents' preference, for whom even though Adelaide was "more than a lady," she was still less than a man.

In letters to Adelaide Benzo depicted her as a second Mary, and emphasised the typological opposition of Eve and the Virgin Mary. By contrast, when writing to Henry, Benzo used both Eve and Mary to reinforce the view that women should be subject to men. He also cited Sarah, wife of Abraham, to indicate that Adelaide would be subordinate to Henry. This was unusual. Eve's disobedience meant that she was "under her husband's power" (Gen. 3:16), but Sarah's chastity and piety were often thought to bolster women's claims to authority (Gen. 21:12).¹⁴⁸ In his letter to Henry, Benzo appeared at first to agree with this. He urged Henry to:

recall what God instructed Abraham: whatever Sarah tells you, hearken to her voice [Gen. 21:12]. Sarah asked: Cast out the slave woman and her son [Gen. 21:10]. If you are Abraham's son, or rather because you are, do the works of Abraham [John 8:39]. Therefore whatever Lady [*domna*] Adelaide tells you, hearken to her voice. If she says: Cast out the Sarabite [Gregory VII] and all who follow him, hearken to her voice. If she says 'by no means,' hearken to her voice because she is turning towards you [Cant 7.10].¹⁴⁹

Yet Benzo then proceeded to collapse the distinction between Eve and Sarah, explaining that, for all Adelaide's power, she was subordinate to Henry. Just as "God said to the woman [Eve]: you shall turn towards the man and he will have dominion over you [Gen. 3:16],"¹⁵⁰ so Adelaide would "hearken to you [Henry] and do your will in all things, for you will have dominion over her."¹⁵¹ This depiction of Adelaide was not entirely gender-related. Her subordination was about

¹⁴⁸ Damian, *Briefe*, nos. 51 (1057), 132-133; 143 (before 1067), 524-525.

¹⁴⁹ *AH*, V.13(14), 496-497: *Recordare, quæ deus precepit Abrahe: Omnia quecumque dixerit tibi Sarra, audi vocem eius. Sarra denique petebat: Eice ancillam et filium eius. Si filius es Abrahe, immo quia es opera fac Abrahe. Omnia ergo, quæ tibi dixerit domna Adeleida, audi vocem eius. Si dixerit: Eice sarabaitam et omnes sequaces eius, audi vocem eius, et si 'Non' dixerit, audi vocem eius, quia ad te est conversio eius.*

¹⁵⁰ *AH*, V.13(14), 498: *Nam mulieri predixit deus Ad virum est conversio tua, et vir dominabitur tui.*

¹⁵¹ *AH*, V.13(14), 498: *ipsa vero audiet et faciet voluntatem tuam in omnibus, quia tu dominaberis illius.*

the proper order of the world, in which even princely women were subject, and obedient, to their emperor.

Yet this was not the only time that Benzo compared Adelaide to Eve. Around 1080 Benzo wrote a letter, full of deeply obscure references, to Bishop Cunibert of Turin (r.c.1046-c.1082). Benzo wrote of Cunibert's possession of "Thrace, for which you have always striven" (*Tracias, semper quod quesisti*), and warned Cunibert that "If you tell this to Eve, you will lose the garden."¹⁵² This is often interpreted as a warning to Cunibert that if Adelaide knew of his activities or possessions, he would lose them.¹⁵³ Benzo's letter was written at a time when Cunibert was openly supporting Henry IV, but Adelaide was not, which could account for his depiction of her.¹⁵⁴ Yet, in conjunction with the references to Eve in Benzo's letter to Henry, and even to Adelaide herself in the form of the Eva/Ave palindrome, it suggests that even when Benzo intended to praise or at the very least not denigrate Adelaide, he still referred to her in terms of one of the pre-eminent negative figures of femininity available to medieval authors.

Conclusion

Adelaide was, as Benzo himself acknowledged, a princely woman. He made extensive use of regal and rulership imagery in connection with Adelaide: he urged Burchard of Lausanne to make her the "ruler and leader of the general consultation." He told Adelaide that she would rule in Italy next to the king, and called her a law-giver, a duke, a prince, and a patrician of the Roman senate. He used the classical figure of Egeria, the legendary figure of Gambara, and biblical figures, including the queen of Psalm 44, Martha, and the Virgin Mary, to depict Adelaide as a ruler, advisor and mediator. Partly through means of these exemplars, Benzo drew parallels

¹⁵² *AH*, V.8, 476-477: *Nam si dixeris hoc Eve, ammittes pomerium.*

¹⁵³ *Tracias* and *pomerium* are thought to refer to property in Tarentaise (Lehmgrübner, *Benzo*, 70-71) and/or to public powers or episcopal immunities granted to Cunibert in Turin (Previté-Orton, *History*, 246-247). For an allegorical interpretation: Seyffert, *AH*, 478 nn.178, 180.

¹⁵⁴ On Cunibert: Giuseppe Sergi, *L'Aristocrazia della preghiera. Politica e scelte religiose nel medioevo italiano* (Rome, 1994), 181-185.

between Adelaide and Henry IV of Germany: Adelaide was Egeria to Henry's Numa Pompilius, and a second Virgin Mary to Henry's second Christ. Benzo thus created a remarkable image of Adelaide, a non-royal woman, not simply as a ruler, but almost as a female counterpart to the emperor. In this sense, Benzo's *domina superdomina* could even suggest that he saw a contrast not only between Adelaide (a female ruler) and other women (the *wives* of rulers), but also between Adelaide (a *princeps*) and other rulers (*domini/ dominae*).

Nevertheless Benzo also argued that Adelaide's rule was dependent upon submission. According to Benzo Adelaide should emulate not only Mary's queenship, but also her obedience in order to become part of God's providential plan. This circumscribed depiction of Adelaide's authority was primarily a consequence of Benzo's aim in writing the *Ad Heinricum*. To secure preferment for himself Benzo emphasised Adelaide's importance to the imperial cause and his own key role in securing her help. Yet in order to praise Adelaide without undermining Henry, Benzo argued that Adelaide would acquiesce with Henry's plans. This emphasis on the importance of order and hierarchy resolved the apparent tension between Benzo's depiction of Adelaide's princely status and her ultimate subordination to Henry: Adelaide was licenced to rule others only if she, in turn, served Henry.